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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Actor, Singer and Politician Vakhtang Kikabidze Dead at 84

Kikabidze acted in legendary films by director Georgi Daneliya.

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Courtesy of Laima Rendezvous Jurmala

The Georgian actor, singer and political figure Vakhtang Kikabidze died in a Tbilisi hospital on Sunday. The cause of death was not released, but his producer Rati Abzianidze said that Kikabidze had been in poor health for many years.

Kikabidze was one of the Soviet Union's most popular singers and actors. He had the distinction of registering the first "vocal-instrumental ensemble" — that is, a popular music group — in 1958. He continued to perform until recent years in Georgia, Latvia, Azerbaijan and other venues.

In the 1960s he embarked on a film career, acting in more than 20 Georgian and Russians films including "TASS is Authorized to Announce" and "Hopelessly Lost." He was best known for his work with Georgian director Georgi Daneliya: "Ku! Kin-dza-dza" (2013); "Mimino" (1977); and "Fortuna" (2000).

“Mimino” made him a star. It is the funny and touching story of a Georgian pilot (Kikabidze) who comes to Moscow with dreams of becoming an international Aeroflot pilot and ends up having adventures exploring Moscow with an Armenian truck driver played by Frunzik Mkrtchyan whom he meets at the Rossiya Hotel. Kikabidze also sings the film’s theme song, “Chito-Gvrito,” which has remained a nostalgic hit throughout the former Soviet republics.

Kikabidze had a reputation for speaking his mind politically, even during the Soviet period. He criticized the brutal April 9, 1989 attack on protesters in Tbilisi that resulted in 21 dead, and he severed all relations with Russia after that country’s 2008 invasion and partial annexation of Georgia. He refused the Order of Friendship offered that year by then-president Dmitry Medvedev and never performed inside Russia again.

He was a strong supporter of Ukrainian independence and the 2014 Euromaidan protests. In 2021 Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky awarded him the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise.

In 2020 Kikabidze was elected a member of the Georgian parliament in a bloc that united several oppositional parties.

Details on the funeral have yet to be announced, but it expected to be held in Georgia on Jan. 19.

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